

what goes unsaid (and what is revealed by not saying anything) by yellowribbons

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Summary:

Jonathan Byers reflects on his relationship with Nancy in the aftermath of the Demogorgon's demise.

-Or, Will Byers has missed a lot.

what goes unsaid (and what is revealed by not saying anything)

Jonathan Byers has been coming to the Wheeler household to pick up his brother from games of Dungeons and Dragons for years now. It hasn't always been Dungeons and Dragons that pulled his brother away from their home, and, of course, he hasn't always been old enough to drive (though sometimes, pending the circumstances, he still did), but this time feels different, all the same.

It's been a month since Hopper and his mom had pulled Will from the wreckage of the Upside Down, a month since he sat across from Will's hospital bed waiting for him to wake up, a month since he bought a bear trap and cut his hand to match Nancy Wheeler's.

He had been helping his mom repair the damage he did to the carpet when she finally asked him about the cut. Hopper showed up with a hammer and some wood three days into the mini-construction project and started to work on the front wall Joyce had opened with the ax. Jonathan didn't know how he knew to show up, and apparently Joyce didn't either, but she kept saying thank you until Hopper decided he was finished.

"Did—does it hurt?" she asked, voice low to minimize the trembling.

"Not really," he replies.

"Is she okay?" she says, looking at him this time. He knows she wants to talk about it, talk about *her*, but he can't bring himself to speak. He hasn't talked to Nancy since it all ended, and frankly, he wouldn't know what to say, doesn't know how to be *normal* after all that (not that anyone thought he was normal to begin with).

"I hope so," he says, and he doesn't say anything else about it for the rest of the day.

When he parks his car outside of her house—because it will always be *her* house—he takes a second, wipes his hands on his jeans, and prepares to ring the doorbell, half wishing she'll be the one to

answer, half praying she won't.

To his surprise, Mr. Wheeler is the one to answer the door (usually it's Mrs. Wheeler), and he gestures vaguely to the basement, giving a mumbled and unnecessary, "He's downstairs."

"Thanks," Jonathan says as Mrs. Wheeler calls to ask who is at the door and Mr. Wheeler hurries away to the kitchen.

He knows the way to the basement like the back of his hand, and soon he's silently making his way down the stairs to find Will and his friends congratulating each other on yet another ten-hour-long campaign.

"Ready?" he asks when they notice him standing at the bottom of the steps.

Will nods and races to find his coat. Jonathan ushers him upstairs after an even longer and drawn-out set of goodbyes—apparently Mike, Dustin, and Lucas aren't taking any chances anymore—and they make their way up to the door when Jonathan sees someone he missed on the way downstairs.

Steve.

He almost trips when Steve makes eye contact, but then Steve stands from his spot on the couch and walks over, sticking out his hand.

"Hey, Jonathan," he says softly, and from this distance Jonathan can see the scars on his face. He winces. Will looks back and forth between them with confusion, and Jonathan presses his shoulder lightly, saying *I'll tell you later*.

Jonathan takes Steve's hand. "I'm so—"

Steve waves it off. "Water under the bridge, man. I needed it." He pauses, claps Jonathan on the shoulder. "I'll see you at school, okay?"

Jonathan nods, still slightly confused. "Yeah. Okay."

Will begins to head out, and Jonathan follows, waving goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler. They're halfway out the door when he hears

her.

Shit.

“Wait—” she calls, and there’s thudding on the stairs as she runs down, almost slipping on the last one in her haste.

Instinctively he reaches out a hand to steady her, and immediately he pulls it back. *No.* She made her choice, and he no longer has the right to touch her.

She looks up at him, slightly breathless, wide-eyed, with a tiny smile, and everything about her that he’s tried to suppress for the past month comes flooding back to him.

Suddenly he can’t stop thinking about the way she fit into his arms when he pulled her from the Upside Down, the way her mouth quirked upward whenever she put on a brave face, and the fear in her eyes before she took the kitchen knife to her skin. How she was willing to go through so much, knowing her best friend wasn’t likely coming back.

How he thought she was cute from the first moment he saw her, all those years ago in first grade when she walked in with a red ladybug backpack and matching polka-dotted socks. As the years went on, she only became prettier, which made her the object of many other students’ affections, of which she was mostly oblivious, content to believe no one truly knew her except for Barb.

How she would never know how much he *saw* her, and how she was the first one to truly *see* him.

“I, um, got you a Christmas present,” she says, and she all but shoves it into his hands.

He blinks, stunned. “Thanks. I didn’t get you anything; I feel bad—”

“No, no, no,” she says, then shrugs a little. “It’s not really a gift—I mean it shouldn’t have to be, but it’s a surprise nonetheless.” She pauses. “Merry Christmas, Jonathan.”

And then she kisses him on the cheek.

It's nothing more than a few seconds, but it speaks volumes. She pulls away, eyes downcast.

You should have said something.

I tried. So many times.

"Thanks," he says, still reeling, and he holds up the package so that she doesn't think he's thanking her for the kiss.

"Of course," she says, softly. "Drive safe."

He nods, and when he and Will get back to the car, Will asks to open the present, which turns out to be a new camera, nicer than his old one, and Jonathan is smiling, wider than he has since they got the news Will was still alive.

"I missed a lot, huh?" Will asks.

"Yeah," Jonathan says. "I'll tell you everything."